The FSO's AO Database for the Stryker Company

By First Lieutenant
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A platoon leader in a new Stryker reconnaissance, surveillance and target acquisition (RSTA) troop deployed to Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) is tasked to meet with local inhabitants and search some buildings in a particular part of the troop's area of operations (AO). This is his first patrol, but he is not as nervous as one would think, thanks to the troop fire support officer's (FSO's) AO database.

Before planning the mission, the platoon leader went to his computer, opened a folder and selected files on the buildings in his patrol area, based on his map recon. The file contained the names of the heads of the two families in one building with hyperlinks to the respective profiles. He learned the men in the families are both Sunni Arabs. One is the father of four and works as a mechanic; the other is a construction worker with seven children. Both reported they have lived in the area for 10 years and originally are from a town 20 miles away.

The platoon leader knew he had enough information to begin his recon patrol and to make "small talk" with the men when questioning them about activities near the other building, an abandoned warehouse.

This platoon leader's troop FSO had created an AO database for quick, significant intelligence on his and the other platoon leaders' AOs.

The company FSO in OIF wears many hats, including one for information operations (IO) at the company level. With minimal experience or training, an FSO can make an impact on his company by organizing data and generating intelligence for company patrols. He does this by creating an easy-to-use AO database that anyone can open and find exactly what he needs with little or no assistance.

The battalion S2 cell cannot provide this kind of platoon-level intelligence constantly because it lacks the time and manpower to update such a database. FSOs can build a database and pass it up to the battalion but also throughout their companies—supporting the folks who need the updated information immediately. The AO database provides applicable intelligence to maneuver platoons before they go on patrols or conduct cordon and search operations. The database must be a thorough yet easily managed reference that, basically, is a trimmed-down collection of all information gathered on the AO.

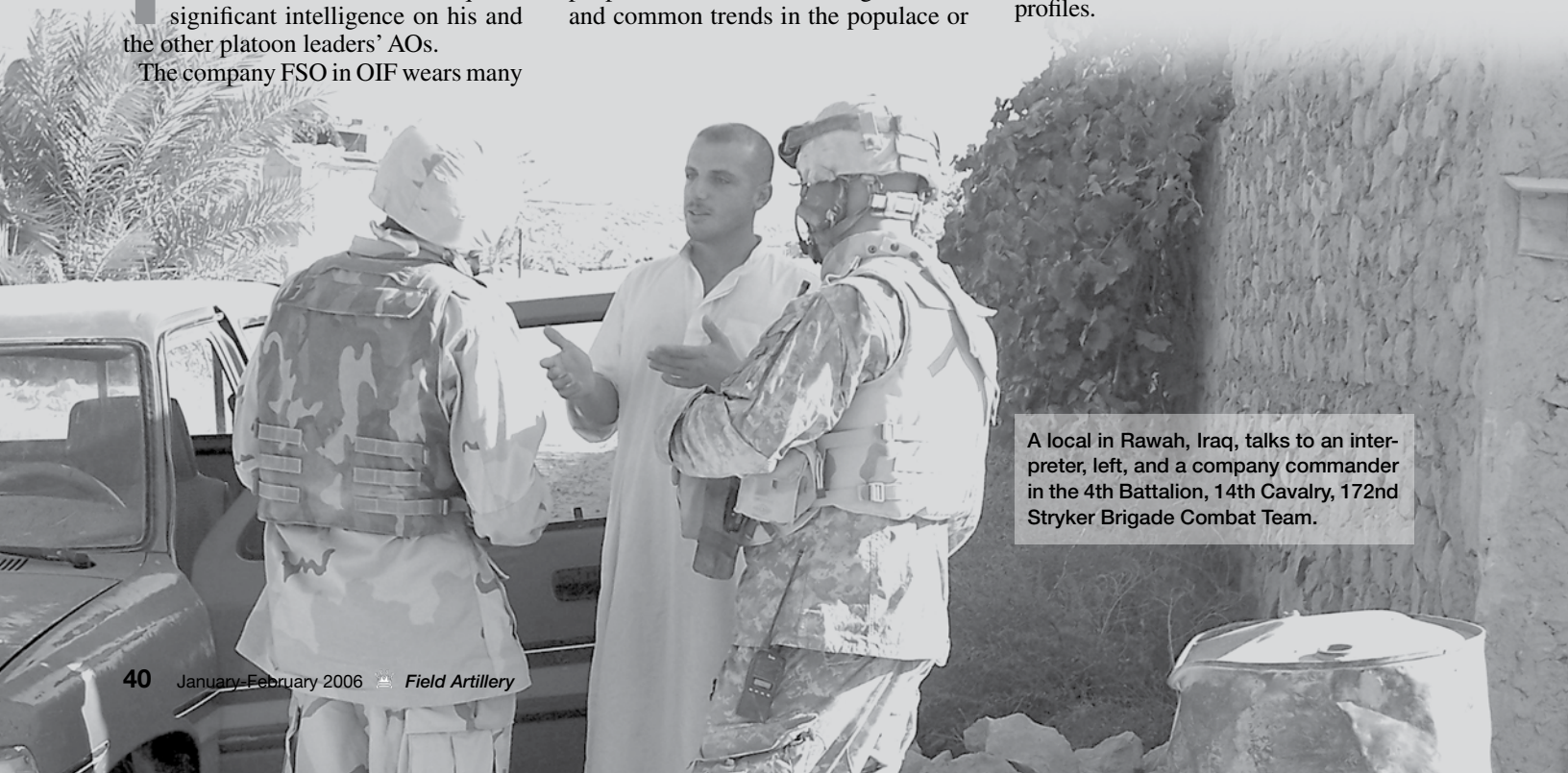
The FSO must review large amounts of raw information from platoon patrol debriefings for significant data, such as people encountered, buildings entered and common trends in the populace or economy. Then this information is separated into categories and each person or place saved under a specific file using a profile template.

The FSO only has to fill in the blanks of the profile template. He usually will have some blanks in the profiles. Few maneuver leaders have time to question individuals thoroughly, asking all the right questions, or take note of the details of buildings or the area to update old or fill out new profiles completely.

Three steps make this system work properly: gather raw data, organize the data into intelligence categories and make the intelligence easily accessible.

1. Gather the data. This first step is done by debriefing platoon leaders after missions and through information gathered by the FSO's conducting missions.

The best way to debrief platoon leaders is to ensure that everyone has a digital copy of the battalion's debriefing format. Then each leader can fill in the information on a computer in the company command post and pass a copy to the FSO and battalion S2. The company FSO must ensure that the platoon leader saves pictures taken during the mission on the computer and that he understands the debriefing process, helping to ensure the platoon leader asks the right questions to fill in gaps in the profiles.



A local in Rawah, Iraq, talks to an interpreter, left, and a company commander in the 4th Battalion, 14th Cavalry, 172nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team.

To keep from wasting the platoon leader's time, the FSO focuses the debriefing on information about people to whom the platoon leader talked, buildings searched and the locations of enemy activities, including any improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and unexploded ordnance (UXO) the platoon leader found. The FSO also encourages platoon leaders to take pictures of the people they meet as well as outside views of the buildings.

When the FSO goes out on missions, he also can gather data. It's important for the FSO to have a "feel" for the AO by experiencing it as much as possible.

2. Organize the data. The easiest way to create the database is to compile the information, put it into a profile and save it. With profile templates already prepared, this should take about 10 to 15 minutes per debriefing.

A good format for a people profile template is to have the person's picture (taken with a digital camera) on the right of a document with the individual's statistics on the left. A building profile can have a similar format with a picture and information. See the figure for the categories of information in the people and building profiles.

3. Make the information accessible. Probably the hardest part is putting the information into a format that platoon leaders can quickly and easily reference before missions.

One problem with gathering data is that when too much is received at once, it often is dropped in a computer file somewhere and forgotten. At the battalion level, there seems to be such a constant dump of vast amounts of information that the intelligence cell does not have the manpower to adequately organize, process and disseminate it as solid intelligence. What intelligence the cell does organize and process goes into the military decision-making process (MDMP) and is put out through operations orders (OPORDs) and fragmentary orders (FRAGOs). Thus the FSO saves copies of all information sent to the battalion S2 so he has the information for his line companies.

At the company level, the FSO must not tuck information away, get bogged down in it or not make it easily accessible by someone unfamiliar with the database. Accessing intelligence from a database should require little effort—sort of like going to the library and finding a particular book.

People Profile
- Name, Age, Height, Type of Build and Eye Color
- Ethnicity (Arabic, Turkmen, Kurdish, etc.)
- Religion (Sunni or Shi'a)
- Location, Occupation, Place of Origin (City and Country*)
- Family Size and Position of the Person in the Family and Community (Father, Head of Household, Patriarch, Clan leader, etc.)
- Additional Information**

Building Profile
- Building Number and Type (Mosque, House, School, etc.)
- Location and Quality (Disrepair, Intact, Ruined, etc.)
- Occupant(s)
- General Description
- Additional Information**

**Don't confuse country of origin with ethnicity.*
***This is important information that does not fit into other categories of the profile.*

Information for the People and Building Profiles in the Fire Support Officer's (FSO's) AO Database

The FSO must "think like the user" when he organizes his information. If a platoon leader opens the AO database and finds a maze of files named "003," "004," "005," etc., or "Mosque 1," "Mosque 2," etc., he may click on a few files and give up. He doesn't have time to sort through all the files to find the information he needs for his particular patrol.

Instead, he should see three folders labeled "People," "Buildings" and "AO Map." When he clicks on the buildings folder, he should see a list of files named for their building numbers in the AO. If he wants to search, say, Building U-5, he can click on the file with the corresponding name or, if no file exists with that name, click on files of buildings near the target building to get an idea of what he might find in the area.

When he clicks on the file, he should see a photo of the building on one side of the document and all the known statistics on the building on the other side. The block of "Additional Information" in the profile might tell a history of the company's experience with the building: how many times it has been searched and when, what sort of activity has been going on in the area, etc.

The profile also lists the person or people living in the building with name(s) highlighted and hyperlinked to the corresponding people profile(s). When the platoon leader clicks on the hyperlink, the relevant person's profile opens up in the people folder. He sees what the occupant looks like, his occupation, family size and other information. The people folder has each profile saved according to the person's name and the building number where he lives, if known.

The platoon leader can click on the AO map folder and see the location of every IED, UXO or enemy activity in his patrol area marked in color with a key explaining what each mark and date represents.

Platoon leaders will see the value of this easy-to-use AO database if it gives them up-to-date information they can access on computers. It's up to the FSO to ensure they know about the database and how to use it. Intelligence is useless if it isn't used in troop-leading procedures.

One fear is that the database will cause unnecessary work for platoon leaders. Using the AO database, platoon leaders will have information that gives them an idea who or what they might encounter while accomplishing their missions. Even a platoon leader who submitted information on a particular building or area might not need the information in the near future. But after other missions, he might need to return to the area and have forgotten what he input weeks ago. The AO database can refresh his memory and provide up-to-date information input by others.

This database should be saved and passed during battle handover to the next company that takes over the AO.

The key is to inform platoon leaders about the purpose of the database: to provide concise, accurate intelligence on the people and places in their AO so they can plan patrols accordingly.

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